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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001423

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: DRUG ERADICATION HALTED IN 2006 HAS NOT
RESUMED

REF: BEIRUT 1389

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) The Internal Security Forces' (ISF) Counternarcotics Chief said the ISF had to halt its drug eradication efforts in the Bekaa valley agricultural region in 2006 because of the war with Israel and the program has not resumed because police and military personnel were needed to deal with violence elsewhere in both 2007 and 2008. The ISF cannot carry out eradication without security assistance from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). A resident of a village in the Bekaa Valley known for hashish production said that, in previous programs, authorities only eradicated hashish crops that could be seen from the highway and chose not to bother fields that remained out of sight from the main roadway. He said that that Hizballah members in his town grow hashish, but only for their own personnel income. He added that Hizballah turns a blind eye to the drug trade in the Bekaa and south Lebanon because it does not want to alienate its supporters who engage in drug production and smuggling. End Summary.

LAF AND ISF WORK TO
ERADICATE DRUG CULTIVATION

12. (C) In a September 23 meeting with Embassy INL program director, Michel Chakkour, head of the Internal Security Force's (ISF) Counternarcotics Unit, discussed a number of issues related to the GOL's now-halted counternarcotics operations in Lebanon. He said that the ISF and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) were able to go into a number of areas in the Bekaa agricultural region to perform hashish and opium eradication operations before the 2006 War with Israel. However, the LAF and ISF were unable to work in 2006 because of the war and operations could not take place in 2007 due to the use of LAF resources in the battle with Fatah al-Islam terrorists near the northern city of Tripoli, at the Nahr

al-Barid Palestinian Refugee camp.

13. (C) Chakkour noted that the ISF could only eradicate illegal hashish and opium fields with the help of the LAF due to a lack of sufficient ISF manpower and resources. The LAF provided security to ISF teams performing the actual eradication operation, and the ISF would not go into these areas without LAF protection, Chakkour said.

14. (C) Chakkour added that the ISF wanted to start up operations again in 2008, but could not due to the on-going violence in the northern city of Tripoli and a diversion of LAF and ISF resources to stop the fighting there. In addition, the LAF and ISF are not ready to confront heavily armed hashish and opium traffickers. The ISF was warned by residents of drug cultivating regions that it would face serious opposition from villagers and farmers if it tried to restart counternarcotic operations in the area. He claimed, however, that the LAF is ready to stop drug smuggling across Lebanon's borders if it occurs.

LAF AND ISF NOT SUCCESSFUL IN
THEIR ERADICATION PROGRAM

15. (C) In a September 24 meeting with PolOff, Mohammad Chreif, a resident of the village of Yammouneh, (a village in the Bekaa famous for growing hashish), and son-in-law of its mayor, said that in the past, the LAF and ISF would only go to a few villages where hashish and opium could be seen growing from the highways. The LAF and ISF would destroy

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only the visible crops, leaving most fields out of sight from the highway untouched. Chreif noted that the LAF and ISF tried to enter Yammouneh in 2005 to do some eradication and the villagers attacked the LAF and ISF personnel, injuring several officers.

UN PROGRAM
A FAILURE

16. (C) Chreif added that the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) had a program in Lebanon from 1995 - 1999 as part of a GOL eradication program, with the use of international donor assistance, for the Bekaa region (reftel). The FAO spent approximately \$22 million on the program, which was a total disaster, according to Chreif. Most of the money was wasted or stolen, and Chreif said that several UN employees were able to build personal villas using the FAO funds. In addition, the FAO chose unprofitable alternative crops for the farmers to grow, such as potatoes, apples, and oak trees, which motivated many farmers to opt out of participating in the program.

NOW IS THE TIME TO START
CROP SUBSTITUTION PROGRAM

17. (C) Chreif argued that now is the time to try a crop substitution program. Hashish has lost its value. Farmers are losing money and looking to grow alternative crops, according to Chreif. He said two to three years ago, farmers would earn \$1,000 per kilo for hashish, but now only earn \$100. Chreif attributed the lost earnings to basic economics, noting that when the price was high many farmers turned to growing hashish. Now that supply has increased, demand has gone down causing the price to drop. He plans to meet with Agriculture Minister Elie Skaff to discuss a plan he and his father-in-law, the mayor, are currently working on to substitute industrial hemp production for hashish cultivation.

18. (C) Chreif added that the real profiteers from the drug trade in Lebanon are the few exporters who have a monopoly

over the business and have been able to set high mark-up prices for themselves. He said the exporters smuggle the drugs in tires on ships to Egypt and Europe. Currently, only small farmers are being arrested, while the huge exporters continue to operate with few legal ramifications.

HIZBALLAH TURNS BLIND EYE TO
DRUG TRADE IN BEKAA AND SOUTH

19. (C) Chreif acknowledged that some Hizballah members in Yammounah were growing hashish. Chreif said Hizballah has turned a blind eye to the drug trade in the Bekaa because it wants to avoid losing popular support by confronting the powerful tribes and farmers who live in the area and cultivate the drug. Chreif also said the Hizballah is allowing hashish to be transported from the Bekaa to the south, and on to Israel. Hizballah allows this trade to occur because its supporters gain money from the business. While the drug trade is an important source of income for Hizballah, Chreif said they actually earn more money from selling fuel (from Iran) on the black market.
GRANT